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ABSTRACT

A summary of an unpublished special problem by Katherine K. Hill, this paper found that Missouri Delta women are more similar than different despite varying economic levels. A Marriage Role Expectation Inventory of 37 statements was given to groups of women. The groups included professional and subprofessional Headstart personnel, members of Extension Clubs, parents of Headstart students, and limited-income women enrolled in Office of Economic Opportunity programs. Scores were tabulated according to income, education, and age on a traditional versus equalitarian scale. The results indicated that higher income levels do not mean more equalitarian attitudes about the roles of men and women in marriage; women from the lowest income groups were not more traditionally inclined. The amount of formal education had a positive relation to equalitarian concepts with women with elementary or less education seeming more traditional and valuing manual homemaking skills. College educated women attached less importance to homemaking skills. They attached more value to kindness in husbands, while less educated women attached greater importance to ambition and being a provider. (RS)

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A STUDY OF MARRIAGE ROLE EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN LIVING IN MISSOURI DELTA COUNTIES AS RELATED TO SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS

Summary of

Unpublished Special

Problem Report

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A STUDY OF MARRIAGE ROLE EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN LIVING IN MISSOURI DELTA COUNTIES AS RELATED TO SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS

The purpose of this study was to inquire into the concepts women have of desirable roles to be assumed by women and men in the marriage relationship.

The tentative hypothesis was that there is no difference between marriage role expectations of women in the Delta Counties of Missouri in relation to selected characteristics. Generally the investigator has encountered more audience receptivity to human relations subject matter among limited income groups.

The wealth of the area comes from a highly productive agriculture in a developing economy. The pattern of inherited wealth in an extended family situation is characteristic of the ethos of the locale. This contributes to high incomes without the educational level usually related to the more affluent society, and could well contribute to cultural lag in interpersonal competencies within family units.

Reasons for the Study

Family stability and the forces that threaten it is a focus of concern in Extension Home Economics, Community Development and Youth Programs. Changing roles of family members, with the resulting tensions and pressures, affect the adjustment to emerging and shifting values. "Role may be defined as the member's orientation or conception of the part he is to play in the organization." (F. Musgrove, Youth and the Social Order (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 110). It was assumed at the beginning of this study that the newer values of the equalitarian marriage and the democratically organized household would be more conducive to needed adjustments than would the traditional, patriarchal, male dominant persuasion. The degree of adjustment may well effect the critical points of readiness for learning and change. Adjustment is made up of internalized concepts, attitudes and values. These are not measured by census figures and other tangibles ordinarily used in arriving at teaching objectives.

Extension personnel in Delta Counties are increasingly involved in planning and implementing educational programs for a heterogenous audience. Priorities of need and time make program flexibility desirable to reach both socially deprived and the more affluent society. The difference in individual characteristics and attitudes within a group categorized above or below the poverty level may be more significant than the variance between socio-economic levels. Findings in other geographic areas have led to certain assumptions in program projection. Are these assumptions true, in fact, of the Delta milieu?

Description of Research Sample and Methodology

Materials and methods used in this study included a Marriage Role Expectation Inventory of 37 statements taken from a list developed at Northwestern State College in Louisiana. Selections for the shortened version were made by Arthur McArthur, Extension Specialist in Human Relations and Family Life, Missouri Extension Division. The inventory was administered face to face by the investigator to groups of women. This was done during the late spring and summer of 1967.

Groups included year round and summer Headstart personnel of both professional and sub-professional status from six Delta Missouri counties. Others were members of Extension Clubs, parents of Headstart enrollees and limited income women meeting for instruction in the Homemaker Development Programs funded with OEO monies with Extension as the delegate agency.

The sample of people has several limitations. It was limited to groups that were available and willing at that time of the year. Thus, sampling, although done randomly in the final selection for tabulating results, was non-random; and not a basis for attitudinal generalization to the population as a whole. It did not provide information on marital status or the one-parent family situation which is high in this area. No effort was made to secure information of racial differences; although the majority of the low income women were Negro.

Respondents completed the questionnaires independently. The total number of completed inventories was 378. They were sorted into five stacks according to income level to maintain a tentative tabulation of progress in securing a heterogenous group of respondents.

Sampling was accomplished by taking every third inventory in each stack. A total of 124 inventories were secured from the five stacks.

The version of the Marriage Role Inventory used included 17 equalitarian statements and 20 traditional ones. Traditional was defined as adherring to the tradition of male dominant, female dominated roles, and the automatic masculine position in relation to interpersonal relations in the home. Equalitarian was defined as preferring the equal or balanced approach according to individual skills, interests and time.

The sample of 124 inventories was scored individually by counting separately the number of agree responses to traditional statements and to equalitarian statements. The difference between these totals was the final score for individual respondents.

Scores were tabulated according to income, education and age on a traditional versus equalitarian scale to secure a frequency distribution in relation to variables considered. The investigator was interested in responses to five specific traditional statements. These dealt with homemaking skills, spending money, conversational topics preferred by women, the husbands's role as an ambitious provider and parental responsibilities for older children.

Mean scores in the five different income, education and age categories were computed by hand as a method of making the data easier to study. Other computation was figuring percentages of respondents at each educational level who gave traditional responses to the five statements selected for further study.

Description and Analysis of Results

The results of this study indicate general tendencies. Statistical means were not used to prove significance.

Compilations indicated higher income levels did not mean more equalitarian attitudes about the roles of men and women in marriage. Women from the lowest income category were not inclined to be more traditional.

Generally, the amount of formal education had a positive relationship to equalitarian concepts. Women with elementary or less education were more traditional.

Education was inversely related to income. The college educated segment involved in the study were generally not in the upper income bracket. This strengthened the situation statement given in the purpose of this study. The pattern of inherited productive land wealth contributes to higher incomes without the usual relationship with education.

Respondents under 25 years of age were slightly more equalitarian. However the degree of difference according to age did not imply an assumption that older women have more traditional attitudes.

Women with elementary or less education are more inclined to value manual homemaking skills over being an attractive and interesting companion as a desirable role characteristic for wives. They attached greater importance to ambition and being a good provider as desirable qualities in a husband over kindness and skill in relating to people.

A college education seemed to relate positively with rating manual homemaking skills of lesser importance for women, and the desirability of kindness and understanding as admirable masculine characteristics. A definite pattern of relationship between education and management of family finances was not shown. Most money matters are to be decided by the husband according to 27.5 percent of the respondents.

More women agreed they would generally prefer to talk about clothes, recipes and children to conversation about public affairs.

Traditional reactions were reflected in the division of parental responsibility for children according to sex. College and high school educated women were less likely to approve the man-boy, women-girl lines of responsibility. Those with less than a high school education were more traditional.

On the basis of characteristics considered, marriage role expectations of Delta Area women appear to be more similar than different.

Implications

Findings in this study tend to support the concept of alikeness. Implications are that traditional values are not limited to deprived women or to the aging. There is a need for toning up a whole society of women to become a more active force in coping with changing social patterns in an increasingly depersonalized society. Active involvement cannot be limited to the home and hearth of yesteryear, but expanded to meaningful action in public concerns; those that in the final analysis determine the kinds of communities families live in.

Findings in this study imply that many women are not cognizant of the changes that are occuring in family life patterns and the challenge of acceptance of self and others.

Extension youth agents might well give further consideration to the effect of role concepts on youth's response to group activities. Being comfortable with role expectations may well determine the availability and efficiency of voluntary leadership.

Extension Home Economists dealing with family economics and various phases of consumer competencies may need to consider the family unit approach.

Some Extension Community Development Agents have expressed concern for involving more women in planning efforts to implement concern for "people needs." Findings of this study may help to explain not only the hesitancy of many women to become involved, indeed to consider it a proper role, to share in community problem solving; but the tendency of men to exclude them.

"In large part, man is created by his family. In order to help men become man enough to tackle social problems, we must be concerned with family life." (Eleanore Braun Luckey, "Education for Family Living in the Twentieth Century," Journal of Home Economics 57, November, 1965, p. 686.)

Source: "A Study of Marriage Role Expectations of Women Living in Missouri Delta Counties as Related to Selected Characteristics" A report of an unpublished Special Problem (No. 185) in the Department of Extension Education, University of Missouri - Columbia by Katherine K. Hill, April, 1968.

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